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VI

ARTS OF LIFE

The Village

361 THE typical Orokaiva village would comprise hardly more than a dozen houses, and many settlements are much smaller. In former times, if native accounts are to be trusted, villages were more extensive through need of mutual protection against the raider; and a resident magistrate patrolling the river Gira in 1901 speaks of a village 200 yards long by two chains broad, which contained seventy-one houses and was 'barricaded in with a look-out and fighting platforms on [712] the stockade'.[1] But nowadays pacification has brought about a tendency to scatter in small isolated groups.

The bush settlement is closely surrounded by walls of forest, so that the view is somewhat depressingly circumscribed; among the Salt-Water People the village stands virtually on the margin of the beach; among the River People it is invariably placed on the river bank. In most cases and in so far as the floods allow, it is well situated on 364 dry ground. The modern village, by Government edict, is kept almost scrupulously clean, and when the visit of a patrol is imminent one may see old folk and children engaged in the meticulous removal of weeds. At all times, however, it is fairly well swept by the women. Refuse of coco-nut husks and the like is thrown away beyond the edge [514] of the clearing, and for sanitary arrangements there is the privacy of the circumambient bush. Much of the credit for the cleanliness of the village is due to the tireless scavenging of pigs.

The House

342 In most instances the houses are set in two regular rows, facing one another. The space between, sporadically planted with coco-nut palms, is the scene of dances, plays, and inter-

[1] A. L. Walker, *Annual Report*, 1900–1, p. 33.

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726 though the alarm is happily less acute.) The attacking force having assembled by day usually travels by night, with the intention of surrounding the devoted village and surprising it at dawn. These tactics, however, are not invariable: the raiders are better satisfied with random victims, such as an isolated fishing party.

726 562 It was customary for women to accompany the expedition carrying pots of food; and they might even stand by their husbands as armour-bearers. Sir William MacGregor, ascending the Kumusi in 1894, noted that 'The men carried generally a spear and a shield each, with a woman behind him bearing two or three spears. The women were able-bodied, and unaccompanied by children or small boys. Apparently they were simply armour-bearers.'[1] Again, on the same river in 1895 he met many armed natives, 'the warrior being frequently followed by a woman carrying part of his panoply, or ready to relieve him of his arms when he was induced to dispense with them'.[2] The women were always ready to urge on the fighting men and even to mingle in the fray, as W. E. Armit found when in conflict with the natives of Papangi. For then, when the warriors rushed to the attack among the long grass, cheered on by the shrill cries, 'Cheep! Cheep! Cheep!', of their women-folk, it was found when they were finally beaten off that two of the women lay dead with spears in their hands.[3]

● 712 726 Villages were often built on hill-tops (where there were any hills) by way of defence, and many such sites are marked by clusters of coco-nut palms in the Tain-Daware district. In these easy-going times they have been abandoned for more accessible positions. Tree-houses (*savai*) were built as refuges in emergency, and, as they contained an armoury of spears and (it is said) a supply of food, water, and fire-wood, they enabled the refugees to hold out until help came from their neighbours. In their tree-houses the natives were for the time being secure enough, for an enemy armed with nothing more than the spear could not safely venture within striking distance. An interesting incident of the early days

[1] *Annual Report*, 1893–4, p. 34. [2] *Ibid.*, 1895–6, p. xvii.
[3] *Ibid.*, 1899–1900, p. 91.

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shows how much confidence the native felt in his retreat. In the Sisarita district Mr. Armit with his police and carriers entered what was apparently a recently evacuated village. Finding a tree-house in a garden, one of his carriers swarmed up the ladder intent on the search for loot, only to come howling down minus the index finger of one hand. Putting his hand on the airy threshold of the *savai*, which he took to be unoccupied, the unlucky carrier had received a blow from a stone which crushed off two joints of his finger. The still more unlucky refugee, who had no doubt hoped to escape detection, now began 'a lively bombardment with stones and spears' of a constable and several carriers, and, after frustrating all other attempts at capture by the constable, was finally shot—an end to the fray which perhaps astonished him in the rather pathetic security of his tree-house.[1]

Among the coastal people, when the villagers were at work in their inland gardens, sentries were posted on the beaches to guard against attacks from the sea. Sir William MacGregor, approaching several large villages below Oro Bay, found that his arrival was anticipated. 'Before we got within a couple of miles of the first one it was evident that the inhabitants had discovered our presence, and were preparing for our first visit to them. The glass showed the men to be assembling together, all dressed in paint and feathers, each man armed with shield and spear, as well as with a stone club. One man came toward us along the beach at full speed, and at about a mile from the village took two armed warriors from a post in the bush, where they had clearly been stationed as sentries. The three men then ran towards the village as hard as they could, and all the warriors of the tribe concentrated on one spot on the sandy beach.'[2] Among inland tribes the sentry was posted in the branches of a tall tree. One such overlooked the Kumusi near Bogi, and here for months on end two men were perched, one 75 feet, the other about 120 feet, from the ground, watching for carriers and police as they passed on the opposite bank.[3] False alarms were not unknown, as

[1] *Ibid.*, 1899–1900, p. 92. [2] *Ibid.*, 1893–4, pp. 2, 3. [3] *Ibid.*, 1900–1, p. 54.

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726 these sentries, like others, had a way of 'seeing things'. A Tain-Daware man had on several occasions called in his fellow-villagers to beat off an attack of what proved to be merely *binei*.

726 712 It seems that in certain cases at least the village was provided with some kind of stockade, though no trace of these defences remains to-day. As a last point may be mentioned the miniature spear-pits (see p. 49) with which the paths were sometimes beset. They are mentioned as occurring in the Kokoda district, often beside a tree-trunk that has fallen across the path, so that the unwary might step over the log and into the trap. Several of the police had their feet spiked in this manner.[1] Near Bogi, again, Mr. Alec Elliot, attacking a force of natives established in a strong position on the opposite side of a garden, found this garden to be 'one mass of small spears and spear-pits'.[2]

Peace-Making

728 The lively monotony of warfare was broken by intervals of peace. A truce-making was called *peka*, and the first emissaries were women who, born members of one tribe, had married into or been captured by the other. In some cases it would seem that hostages (*otavo*, lit. 'friend' or 'mate') were exchanged. Two or three from either side would spend a few days and nights with the opposite party, and after this the two tribes would meet in armed force on some common ground between their territories to exchange gifts of pigs and ornaments. The proceedings even of a peace-making bore a characteristically warlike appearance, and sometimes the parties who had met to conclude a truce ended by joining in battle again.

It would seem that the position of the hostages was by no means secure, and the idea of exchanging them was to make sure of revenge if one party were done to death. There are tales of the meanest treachery. When after the conclusion of a *peka* a number of Hunjovarehu men had brought gifts to Wasida to make good the damage done in a previous raid, they were hospitably entertained and accom-

[1] *Annual Report*, 1899–1900, p. 93. [2] *Ibid.*, 1900–1, p. 12.